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Cuban official, Soviet diplomat leave foreign posts, defect to U.S.

By Roger Fontaine
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A senior Cuban officer with an extensive background in Cuban military and intelligence operations in Africa defected in Spain two months ago and is now safely in the United States, The Washington Times learned yesterday.

In New Delhi, a missing Soviet diplomat in the Indian capital was also reported to have defected to the United States.

The Cuban, Lt. Col. Joaquin Mourino Perez, defected in Madrid on Jan. 24, and shortly thereafter was flown to the United States for extensive debriefings.

According to one administration official, it will be several months before he will go public but, according to the same official, "evidently, he has a lot of information."

Another U.S. official contacted by The Times yesterday described the defector as "a jewel," and his role of "coordinator" as "the man who makes it happen," an equivalent to an American chief of staff.

Furthermore, his rank of lieutenant colonel — a relatively junior rank — indicates he is an officer in the Cuban ministry of the interior which has "all of Cuba's special operations assets," according to the same official. As such he was above and outside the regular armed forces structure "with a direct shot to [Cuban President Fidel] Castro," he added.

Until today, the defection had attracted the attention of only one small-circulation newspaper in Madrid, El Alcazar, which published an account of the defection on Jan. 26.

American intelligence officials, however, are still keeping the Cuban defector under tight wraps, both for security reasons and to determine his genuineness.

According to one retired U.S. intelligence officer, the process is

called "establishing his bona fides."

In the case of defectors, it is a very "meticulous process" in which the defector's information is cross-checked and his motives for defection probed for ulterior purposes, he added.

Described by sources as "the coordinator" of Cuban troops in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen, Col. Mourino first approached a Cuban exile club, the Circulo Cubano, in Madrid and expressed a wish to defect to the United States.

Later, he was put in touch with the U.S. Embassy in Madrid and was subsequently flown to the United States, where he has remained under the custody of U.S. intelli-

gence officials.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, the Indian government announced yesterday that a Soviet diplomat who had disappeared last week while jogging in a Delhi park had defected and left the country for the United States. He left a wife and daughter behind.

Igor Gezha, 37, a third secretary in the embassy's information department, had been in India for six years and was to return soon to the Soviet Union for a new assignment.

His principal job at the embassy was editor of the Soviet propaganda magazine, Soviet Land.

Neither the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi nor the State Department

would comment on the announcement, citing the Reagan administration's policy of refusing to discuss defections.

State Department spokesman Brian Carlson had no statement, saying: "We never comment one way or another on asylum."

Fear for the safety of the defecting Soviet official grew after Victor Khitzichenko, a senior engineer in the Soviet Embassy's economic division, was slain in his car last week by a motorcycle gunman who escaped with an accomplice.

Indian police now believe, however, there was no connection between Mr. Gezha's disappearance and Khitzichenko's murder.

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